

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

27 DEC 1979

CONFIDENTIAL (Entire text)

TO: The Secretary

FROM: ARA - William G. Bowdler

ARGENTINA UNVEILS ITS POLITICAL PLAN

In its first move toward political normalization since taking power almost four years ago, the Argentine Junta on December 19 issued a statement of basic principles and guidelines upon which a return to constitutional rule in Argentina will be based. Although the guidelines set no time for elections or a resumption of political party activity, they provide a Government commitment for a return to civilian rule and a framework for developing further proposals.

The guidelines:

-- reaffirm the fundamental principles of the National Constitution, including the full exercise of civil and political liberties, and equality before the law;

-- call for a political system providing orderly transfers of power through "currents of public opinion channeled through large political parties" whose political objectives are clearly expressed;

-- proscribe "totalitarian ideologies", collectivization of the means of production, and exaltation of personality cults;

-- give the Armed Forces decision-making power with regard to "national strategy, national security, and the defense of the national constitution" after the return to civilian rule;

-- refer to "political disqualifications" that will be "selective and imposed by the judiciary without prejudice to the Military Junta's own faculties in this area";

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-- establish a Political Commission to advise the Armed Forces on "politico-institutional normalization"; and

-- promise implementing legislation in the second half of 1980, following a dialogue between the military and Argentina's civilian political leaders regarding the structure of political parties and their normalization.

Thus far, there has been little internal reaction to the Government's guidelines; political party leaders have stated they wish to study the document before commenting.

The Government's announcement, while avoiding such specific commitments as holding elections, restoring political party activity, and returning the country to civilian rule, provides a framework upon which discussion of these subjects can be based. The withholding of comment by political party leaders probably is a reflection of the uncertainty on how the guidelines will be applied and on the role of the civilian "old guard" in the process. (One report indicates that approximately 1,000 individuals would be proscribed from political activity for an unspecified period of time, a move that could affect many former politicians.)

The plan indicates that the military leadership will proceed slowly toward redemocratization, a possible reflection of disagreement within the Junta over the direction and speed normalization should take. Although the apparent clean sweep of Army CINC Viola's moderates in the recent military promotions will lend impetus to the plan's implementation, full restoration of constitutional rule probably cannot be expected before the mid-1980's. Factors affecting the process over which the Government has little control must also be considered; a resurgence of terrorist activity, a faltering economy, or widespread labor unrest would slow the process. In addition, the important issues of accounting for the disappeared (which is receiving greater public attention in Argentina), ending the abuses of the security forces, and the termination of the special powers granted to the Executive under the "state of siege provisions", remain to be addressed.

Unofficial reports indicate the government will begin early next year to hold conversations with diverse representative groups as the first step in implementing the plan.

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- 3 -

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